

Rebecca Moncur

3517

'Impressions of love that is
lost'

Illness

by Rebecca Moncur

I stared blankly out of the window, the warm sun on my tightening face. The garden extended as far as my eyes could see. The young children were playing in the garden; I was delighted the other residents had family to visit them. I didn't have one to come see me; they had all died in the War.

I cared for her, daily. She did not know this; and she did not know anything. I watched her stare out of the window, waiting for something that would not happen: could not happen. She continued to wait, blissfully unaware of her life- the reality of this and how nothing would change. She did not know who really surrounded her; only who she thought they were. So unaware. So ill.

Not all of my memories were bad: I remember many beautiful events from the past, including Frank. He was the love of my life and I will never live the same, knowing that I will never again see his beautiful blue eyes gazing back, never kiss his crimson lips or run my hands through his fine, silky hair again. Nevertheless I still held all my memories from our wonderful time together.

Every day she believes that her Frank is dead and won't return, as he sits next to her. Watching her glazed over eyes stare out of the clear glass- only dreaming of the days he could kiss her crimson lips and run his hands through her fine silky hair- the days before she completely forgot who he was.

I heard a faint knock and slowly approaching the door, I saw an outline of a tall man. I opened, to be greeted by a friendly face, one I would soon know as Frank.

I instantly fell in love.

We saw each other every day for the entire summer, and slowly learnt everything there was to know. He was a soldier to be posted to war in September, but this didn't stop us enjoying the remainder of our time together. We had a secret that we couldn't share with anyone: I sneaked out every night and we drove for hours-often just enjoying each other's company.

They were so in love- they are so in love. He watches her in pain, hating that he can't do anything to take this away. To remind her of how things were, to show her that he's there, that he loves her and is still here. She loves him, she always tells me of how her 'young love' was the best thing that happened to her and that she wanted Frank to come back but he wouldn't. She tells me I'm her best friend, but I don't want to be her friend.

I want her to know me for who I am: her daughter.

The days went by and everything was blissful: my feelings for him grew and grew, getting stronger each day. He constantly reassured me that everything would remain the same when he came back.

I tried not to dwell too much on it, but I couldn't think of anything but him. He was my whole life, and I wanted to spend all my time with him. We wrote to each other as often as we could, elaborating our love for one another.

He asked me to marry him when he returned. I knew that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him. I wanted him to be the father to my children, and the one I grew old with. I couldn't imagine sharing my life with anyone else.

Hearing her tell me stories of their romance—their relationship—was amazing. These were my parents and I was so lucky they both loved each other so much. The only problem that stood in the way of their love was the fact that she couldn't remember who he was—she didn't know that he wasn't dead. She didn't know that he lived here- in their home. We all lived here, we looked after her, everyday wondering- hoping- that she would remember just anything, wishing things could be different, wishing that one day she would wake up and remember it all. Remember how Frank was here, dad was here, I was here- we were all here. Together.

When he returned it was as if we had met for the first time- we couldn't stay away from each other. We were together all day every day, and when I wasn't with him I was just planning our next outing. Although the time came for him to return again, I had refreshed the memories of our everlasting love.

I sent him a letter to tell him of the news and didn't hear a reply for longer than it would normally take- although I put this down to the fact that sometimes it wasn't safe for them to reply.

She told me memories of her daughter and watching her progress from a young ballerina to a teenage beauty- she told me that she was so polite and yet when she turned eighteen she was rebellious, running off with her boyfriend for days and days before she would return home with no explanation. One time she ran away and never came back again- she assumed her daughter had died in the war. This was not possible, how could she remember memories from when I was eighteen? The war was in place when I was born- how could I have died in the war if it had ended long before my eighteenth birthday? Nothing made sense in her mind- she thought it did but none of it added up. None of her facts were correct, none of her memories true, her brain was eroding, giving up.

My only friend through this whole situation was Frank's mum, and when she appeared at my door one winter's morning I knew something had happened. My heart froze. She told me how Frank had been reported as 'Missing In Action.' I knew I must remain optimistic, but how could I? I would be reminded of him constantly by the young child running around: half of me and half of him.

Growing up knowing you weren't loved was the hardest feeling. She wanted to love me; she wanted that more than anything, but she couldn't. She missed him so much that he was all she could think about. Each memory I made was another experience he was missing out on, and she could never fully allow herself to enjoy it because she felt guilty for not continuing to think about him. Her heart ached and I knew it- I heard her crying in the middle of the night despite her best attempts to hide it.

Nine months passed and I gave birth to the most perfect girl. She reminded me so much of him even at birth: he would have been so proud. Life had to carry on, but I always felt like a part of me was missing; every step she took, word she spoke, every memory made- caused my heart to break more and more. It wasn't fair that he wouldn't see this.

Day by day, everything continues as normal. But it wasn't normal: I felt bored, bored with repeating the same day over and over again. The residents' grandchildren continued to visit, and I saw them grow on a daily basis. They were beautiful- I really wished my family were still here.

They weren't better; not for me anyway, my childhood a distant reminder of how she was 'alone.' Yet she wasn't alone- the accident had affected her much more than she knew. She thought these were

memories but they weren't; they were side effects. I saw her in that hospital bed for a month, unable to move, talk or even think. I often wonder how different life would be if that hadn't happened. If she had just stayed in that summer's day instead of leaving the house and ending up in that horrible disaster with the bomb that killed so many, in some ways I'm lucky she survived, yet in other ways, I almost wish she hadn't. As selfish as it sounds, she has been destroying me every day since then, and she causes me to wonder, to doubt. Are my memories real or are they illusions of the childhood I spent looking after my mother from the age of five? I had to learn- she was in a coma and I remained living with my father. He was so miserable from all of this that he couldn't even take care of himself, let alone me. I became pretty self-sufficient but I missed their company. I missed out on having the care-free childhood that I could only dream about. I wouldn't change it, but I just wish for one moment that she would look up at me, smile, and remember. She would tell me how she was sorry: "Oh my dear, I remember it all, I love you and I am so sorry." Yet this won't happen, so I must continue looking after her, caring for her- as it is my duty, it is my job. Sometimes I think that if she wanted to wake up- to realise- then she could easily do it, she could just wake up. But I mustn't contemplate such things, I can't contemplate it- she should want to wake up, to see me, to see us- but she doesn't and I think that's her choice.

I met with that lovely Miss Wright (as I do on a daily basis) who calls herself my counsellor, and she asked me many personal questions about my past, my life and my family.

I told her he wasn't dead. None of us were- we were the residents in the home and I was the nurse- we reminded her on a daily basis yet she didn't know it; she couldn't remember it. All of her memories are from a film we watched when I was younger, and these are the only things she can think of. Truth is, the residents aren't real and the residents' grandchildren are really her own. She wouldn't remember this tomorrow and I would have to explain the situation to her again for her to faintly recollect her memories before she forgets them and goes back to insisting we were all dead and this reality is not possible. She is alive but she is not living.

I was never allowed to see the others myself, as I was in an isolated room. I felt lonely and wanted nothing more than to see my family again. Realising I was approaching my last few days was hard- my body growing old and weak, but my memories were still strong. I could remember Frank in his well ironed army uniform, remember seeing our daughter Elsie on her first day of school.

I could remember them, but I could no longer *feel* them.

How to Cope

by Rebecca Moncur

Hardly able to move from my bed,
She heard what they said: 'you're making it up.'
This didn't change a single thing:
'It wasn't love, just merely a fling.'
How can you say that? You didn't know.
If only you'd listen, so that you could see,
the whispers, the echoes, the dark voice.

In his head they were silent but loud:
'Don't trap me in here, show me off proud,'
'Climb up to the rooftop and jump off, you'll soar'
But he didn't do that—he fell to the floor.

My lover, he left me and soon I would too leave;
Don't think I am angry—oh I couldn't be—
This was our story, one sick twisted plot.
My dear, I will feel your warm embrace again:
I climbed to the rooftop and fell to the floor.

I didn't cry, I did not weep;
I am not dead, I am asleep;
Asleep in heaven, asleep in hell;
I am not dead—I am just unwell.

You demons inside me, grant me one thing:
Do not fall in love-- it's merely a fling.
See, we can't rely on anyone at all.

We exist in your mind and we want to come out;
We whisper to you, but in your head how we shout.
We love you, we hate you, we pity your friends;
Let us out and we will make amends.

We wish to free them from having you round-
Listen to us, fall to the ground.
'You deserve it, you're worthless, you're fat.'
No one will miss you- how about that?

You can't drown us out, we are always here;
We always come out through anger and fear.
You cannot hate us, for we make up you
and if you hate us.... then you hate yourself too.

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How to Escape

by Rebecca Moncur

The door crept open ajar:
I started to cry, my eyes black.
I could feel the presence coming:
Fear seized my chest; I had to leave.

Through the corridors, round the corners;
Nothing else but a distant call.
I couldn't take the pain any longer.
Wounds were healing; the scars still sore.

I found myself upon the street,
Nothing to wear, no food or water.
I know the pain will never leave:
Maybe soon I'll be able to breathe.

Rebecca Moncur, 3517

How to cope with escape

by Rebecca Moncur

Loneliness;
consumes use—erodes us,
Takes over our every bone until
Our mentality changes.

He doesn't care: she doesn't know.
Why should they care? Surely they'd show-
If they wanted to see me they'd reach out,
But no one does that, so I scream, I shout.
Only I can't do that because no one is there,
No one around me to *slightly* care,
I sit alone in my room, I bitterly cry.
Dear God please tell me why;
Why am I lonely, why am I sad?
I guess I'm just raving mad;
Mad that I try, try all the time
To make others happy- make each of them shine.
Only they don't care, they don't try;
I sit alone in my room and cry, cry, cry
Why should I? If only they knew
How alone I was in this small little room,
Then they'd care, then they'd try,
Because no one likes it when you cry.
No one cares about what they cannot see—
Poor little girl, poor little me—
We only care about the things that we see:
Social Media #itshouldhavebeenme.
But it wasn't you, or her or him
Not @Motherteresacares, @Freyahelps, or @Kim
No one worries if they can find a way out—
Don't have to listen, to hear me shout.
My how I'm lonely, if only you cared,
But it makes me realise: I shouldn't have shared
My friends, my family, my lover too.
If only they listened, if only they knew.
My loneliness takes over, fills me with doubt
I need this, I deserve this, must find a way out
Oh but then Social Media will care:
#Shedoesn'tdeserveit, #Iwasalwaysthere
But you weren't there: no one was, except me.
And that's my problem- but the reason I'm free.

Reflective Commentary

Poetry

The inspiration for my poetry came from the poet Emily Dickinson, I used her poem "We grow accustomed to the dark," to base the themes of my poem because I wanted to emphasise the darkness, and how everyone alters themselves to fit in with it. This is where we generate our own light. I chose to take this in a literal way and have my protagonist reach a point at the end of 'How to Cope' in her own way to adapt to the light- to join her boyfriend in heaven. Yet this changes throughout the three poems, and she eventually manages to find her light by escaping her abusive father.

George Herbert was an inspiration of mine in terms of shaping the poem, he chose to shape *Easter Wings* in the shape of bird wings- like Herbert I chose to explore the idea of shape within my poem to portray immediately to the reader how the narrator may be feeling. Much like Herbert, I wanted to convey messages within my poem so the three poems all show different ideas in terms of shape. *How to cope* is shaped on different sides and as an isolated idea because the feelings of three narrators are explored so I chose to shape the poem in an unusual way to put this idea across immediately. The other two poems aren't as experimental with their shape because this is when the regularity of the mind-set of the girl begins to set in and she is able to fully lay out the poems in a 'normal' way.

How to cope

The protagonist finds herself in 'How to cope' struggling with the suicide of her boyfriend; I chose to structure the poem in free verse- in order to portray the different voices used. I placed her thoughts on the left side of the page without rhyme, because her mentality is fractured and she is unable to function properly, so is therefore unable to produce the harmony necessary for rhyme within her piece. Furthermore the structure of the stanzas presents an uneven sequence of thoughts, and they have an odd number of lines to signify a lack of regularity which even numbers usually seem to present.

The stanzas on the left side of the page also decrease in size stanza by stanza- this is because the mentality of the girl is degenerating and she is unable to compose herself fully. The first stanza has a breakdown of metre which reflects the initial breakdown in her internal feelings. By the final stanza- once we have learnt about the story and thoughts of her boyfriend- she has been so affected that she can no longer contain herself, and this is when she too gives up, which is displayed in the final lines' dismissal of the connotations that come with love, and the change between the idea of love in the first stanza and the final one.

This is opposed by the right hand side of the page being the thoughts of her boyfriend; this is produced in rhyme because he is in a happier place now, so is now able to produce rhyme within his piece of the poem. The stanzas have a regular use a quatrain which presents the formality of how his brain functions better than the girls' and he is able to apply thought and routine.

The middle poem is the connection between the two which is saved until the end in order to mimic the thoughts of both characters- these are their thoughts being personified as a demon and speaking to both the woman and the man. I found this structure most effective because I wanted the reader to understand the thoughts of both characters before they understood those from inside each head. I chose to have this first because it presents the thoughts in the girls' mind, and how this is left open

in order to continue the story into the other poems, in effect I create a narrative sequence to convey emotive poetry for the reader to relate with the situations undertaken by the narrators themselves.

How to escape

The second poem is called 'How to escape,' which also has no rhyme but is superficially in quatrains- it has 3 stanzas with 4 lines per stanza. I wrote it like this to suggest the changing mind-set of the girl, and how she has changed in order to be able to compose a poem with some form of regularity, furthermore this is her physically escaping and her advice on how to escape: this poem of verse is a piece of hope for the character which is why she is now able to compose the poem properly, with more regularity. I decided that this regularity in the composition of the poem presents a suggestion of how if you follow the advice in the poem then you too can find stability.

I used the quatrain as a form within this poem to reflect the constant entrapment of the girl, within this piece she is trying to physically escape from her abusive step father and the entrapment shows her journey on how she is doing this. The inharmonious situation is transmitted through thwarted reader expectations, and where matters seem to be resolved in regular rhythm and isocolon, for example "Through the corridors, round the corners," it is ultimately undermined by the irregularity and falling cadence, for example "Nothing else but a distant call."

How to cope with escape

Finally I chose to order 'How to cope with escape' last because this is the final part of her journey, where she has escaped the feelings and is now finally able to comment upon the journey objectively, I decided to include the use of Social Media and capitalise the S and M because I wanted to present how social media is so idolised and used as a manipulative source, that it has almost been personified- Social Media is now a character in my poem and the girl realises this, and is able to comment upon it, and even use rhyme as she has finally escaped the loneliness and depression she had and can now use rhyme to portray this.

The ironic rhyming couplet in the final two lines contains the central paradox of the overall theme within the series of poems. I ended the piece this way in order to convey the final mind-set of the narrator and how she is finally able to comment upon her own situation objectively.

Prose

The prose originated from the novel *The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks; both reading the novel and watching the film of this allowed me to understand how I could fully explore the idea of mental illness (specifically dementia) through prose. This story follows the journey of Allie and her boyfriend troubles and how she ends up not remembering her own husband.

The idea of incorporating the two differing voices into the prose, came from Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* which looks at the view of the grand-daughter into the piece- I feel this allowed the reader to understand what was going on from more than one point of view, allowing the reader to relate to the situation from more than one perspective which is what I wanted to explore in the prose *illness*- to allow the reader to see the differing voices and the effects on surrounding people.

Having based the prose on World War Two, some form of event would be the best way to explain the loss of memory of the protagonist and that during the War, the most accurate way to describe the memory loss might be due to a bomb. *The Notebook* allowed me to see how this event can

affect the people closest to the victim and I could write from the daughter's point of view to incorporate these feelings into the piece.

I attempted to portray the normalities in the mother's life and how she goes about living with no added restraint; yet this affects the daughter reflected in her narrative passages. I used this alternating view point from Jacqueline Wilson's book 'secrets' which explores the story of two girls and this inspired me to write an emotive piece examining this.

The shift of focalisation in the piece adds interest in the reader and intrigues them into continuing to read the piece, it also adds depth and emotion- the reader can see the feelings felt by both voices and how different these two voices are from each other.

The anaphora explored within the elderly woman's piece represents the trapped woman and how she remains to be trapped in the moment she feels she still lives. This is further shown by the consistency in the clichés used- these were fresh ideas when she was younger and now feels as though her daily routine is a repeated lifestyle she lives presented by the repeated clichés. Her romantic clichés capture how time-worn her memories are. The falling tricolon reflects her decreasing mind frame and her feelings therefore are petrified into clichés.

I chose to explore the perspective of the daughter and how she feels it may be the mum's own choice to remain in this mind-set. The repetition of the first person subjective in the mother's piece shows a possible self-centeredness which may have come about because of her illness- she attempts to put herself centrally in her life yet the daughter feels as though she is doing this because of her own desires and not because of the illness.

Furthermore this enables the reader to feel empathy towards the daughter, yet understanding from the mother's point of view. I workshopped my piece originally without a second point of view, and decided from other student's comments that I would include this to add some tension and audience reactions. I chose to structure this as prose because I found it easier to add emotion as there is a wider range of skills available- for example; sentence structure, point of view, paragraphs and punctuation. Although these can be utilised in poetry I felt with prose there is a wider range.

In the first draft I didn't reveal that the second voice was the voice of the daughter until the end. However because the aim in '*Illness*' was to evoke feelings from the reader and to get them to understand the feelings from both points of view, and how these conflict each other on a daily basis, I decided to include a consistent voice. Furthermore I chose to end with the point of view of the elderly lady because I wanted the reader to feel sympathy towards her, after finding out the struggles that the daughter lives with daily and how she manages to cope with them.

I use repetition throughout my piece to evoke a sense of memory as an alienating opposition to the quotidian in the lives of both characters. Repeating the 'crimson lips' and 'fine silky hair' allowed me to portray the two differing views towards this trivial idea. To the elderly woman she wants nothing more than to be touched and loved the way she used to; yet the daughter is portraying this idea as it still happens, and this allows two opposing ideas to clash and create one image for the reader.

Both daughter and mother have very differing views on the upbringing of the former because the accident happened- affecting the memory and thereby causing the mother to create her own images and 'pretend' memories in her head. The daughter explains things as they really are yet the mother

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explains things as she thinks she remembers them. The juxtaposition throughout the piece is an attempt to encourage the reader to evoke their own memories and allow them to empathise with the situations taking place.

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